



The Moorland Association

Shoot day disruption - your essential checklist

Before shooting

1. Your shoot risk assessment should include disruption scenarios.
2. Also brief those involved on your disruption response: meeting points, communication (radio/phone), safe locations. Clarify who is the designated 'speaker'; who is tasked with protecting the group; who will watch vehicles once equipment has been locked away; confirm who is going to maintain a log of what happened when. Remind all that they can and should use their phones to record what is going on.
3. Consider informing your rural crime team of your shoot date(s) and location(s). This notice allows the police to plan.

Step 1 - Protect

1. **Stop shooting.** Swiftly unload guns and place them back in their slips.
2. **Gather everyone** (guns, beaters, flankers, dogs) together. Keep dogs on leads. Do not allow anyone to move off alone. Do not respond to abuse, this is what protesters want. Your goal is to minimise the opportunity for confrontation.
3. When possible, **lock all equipment in a vehicle(s)**. Nominate individual(s) to maintain a dedicated watch on that equipment until the incident is over.
4. **Record evidence.** Video the scene (wide shot of group, then close-ups of faces, flags, license plates). Record distinctive clothing and footwear. Do not place phones near people's faces.

Step 2 – Report

1. Call 999. Explain that “there are people disrupting **lawful activity** and they appear to be committing **aggravated trespass, a breach of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994**, and we are being **intimidated**”. Give your location (what3words or OS grid) and details of protesters and what they are doing. If you name a specific offence, you are making it clear this is not a minor disturbance. However, if people are merely present but not obstructing, you may wish to call 101 and ask for advice. At the first sign of escalation (weapons, violence, refusal to leave) call 999 immediately. It's better to call early and cancel if matters are resolved. Remember that even if the event seems minor, it's wise to report it.
2. Ask for an **incident number**. Share this with others in your group. If anyone should need to call 999 again, they should give the incident number to the operator. This ensures the police know if they are dealing with a single or multiple incidents.
3. Ask the operator if officers are being dispatched and **how long** they are likely to be. If they can't tell you, ask them to call you back with an update. If required, provide a what3words location of your suggested police access point. Let them know if you are sending someone to meet them there to guide them in (if so, share the vehicle details).
4. Unless you have a reason, **do not mention guns**. This may slow down the police response. If you are asked about guns, explain they have been put away and pose no risk.

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Step 3 - Engage

1. The nominated 'speaker' should now approach the protesters. They should **not do this alone**. Do not carry a firearm.
2. The speaker should explain that the protestors are:
 - committing **aggravated trespass**
 - they **should leave** immediately
 - the **police** have been called
 - they are being **video recorded**
3. To reduce the chances of escalation, there should be minimal further engagement.
4. When the police arrive ask them to specifically address aggravated trespass and public order offences. If they are not local, explain the situation with reference to the law and that you have legitimate rights to shoot.

After any disruption

1. Provide witness statements: give full accounts to the police.
2. Submit evidence: give police the video/photos. Do not edit clips – preserve the originals.
3. Log the incident: record all details (times, actions, police response) and the incident number.
4. Follow up: if police action was delayed or absent, contact the rural crime unit for advice.
5. Review plan: debrief team, note lessons learned. If required, update your risk assessment and any communications protocol.

Note on likely police actions

The police have powers of arrest in relation to most criminal offences. However, they may choose to deal with a disturbance by following it up later by either voluntary attendance for interview or with a Community Protection Warning (CPW). These warnings have been shown to be successful. Once issued with a warning a person must not attend a protest, cause distress, damage traps or obstruct activity. They are also required to comply with drone regulations.

If a Community Protection Warning (CPW) is breached the police may escalate this to a Community Protection Notice (CPN). If this is breached a criminal offence is committed. When this goes to court the police can ask for a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO). This has similar conditions and can be applied to entire counties. Any breach is an arrestable offence.

This stepped process is being used by the police to clarify to protesters what behaviour is lawful. It provides those involved with an opportunity to amend their conduct to exercise their right to peaceful protest.

Additional information

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Section 1. Legal context

Landowners and gamekeepers have property rights as well as responsibilities for safety. They may lawfully ask trespassers to leave and, if necessary, seek an injunction against repeat offenders. Police powers to remove protesters generally rely on criminal offences (see below); police cannot arrest someone solely for ordinary trespass (a civil matter). However, if trespassers commit further illegal acts (intimidation, obstruction, damage), those may be criminal. Understanding land access rights and property rights is important.

Land access (CROW Act 2000 – England). Much of the uplands is mapped as “open access” under the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. On these areas the public has a right to roam *on foot for recreation*. However, general restrictions apply: walkers may not disturb or remove vegetation, or deliberately disturb wildlife or gamebirds. These open-access rights do not include interfering with farm or shooting operations. Access is for quiet recreation only. So a person may lawfully walk across a moor, but has no right to obstruct a shoot.

The Act also has a ‘28 Day’ rule which allows landowners or tenants to temporarily close access for purposes such as land management, shooting, livestock management or events. A reason is not required but landowners must notify Natural England (or the relevant access authority) in advance, typically 21 days before the restriction starts. The authority may refuse the restriction if it overlaps with peak access periods (e.g. public holidays).

Beyond the 28 days, further restrictions may be requested by the landowner but these require formal approval and justification, often on grounds such as public safety or land management needs. Access restrictions do not apply to public rights of way (e.g. footpaths or bridleways), which remain open unless separately restricted.

Land access (Wales – Land Reform Act 2016). Wales has a similar right-to-roam regime under the Land Reform (Wales) Act 2016. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) manages open-access land and may impose restrictions by law. Welsh access authorities (NRW, National Park Authorities) handle special access directions, but the basic right to traverse open country still excludes disruptive activity.

Rights of way. Public footpaths and bridleways crossing upland estates permit passers-by to go through a property (from A to B) but not to loiter, trespass off-path, or conduct any protest or demonstration on the way. A footpath exists “only to allow passage” – not to demonstrate or disrupt shooting. If trespassers leave a designated path and then interfere, ordinary (civil) trespass applies. If a protest on the path causes disruption that could become aggravated trespass.

Private property & shooting rights. Shooting gamebirds on one’s own land (or land leased for shooting) is a lawful sporting activity. Shooters are entitled to manage game and host shoot days. In England and Wales, shooting rights are treated as property rights: interfering with lawful shooting can lead to criminal charges (see Section 2 on page 4).

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Section 2. Applicable offences

Aggravated Trespass (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994). A criminal offence of aggravated trespass occurs if a person trespasses on land and intentionally obstructs or disrupts a lawful activity on that land (Section 68). By law this covers any deliberate act (e.g. shouting, blowing whistles or otherwise intimidating participants) that is intended to deter or hinder the lawful shoot. Police can arrest someone for aggravated trespass if that condition is met. The Act also empowers the police to direct any aggravated trespasser to leave; refusal to leave or re-entering within three months is also an offence (Section 69).

Trespass (civil law). Entering private land without permission is a civil trespass. The police cannot arrest a trespasser for that. An occupier may ask trespassers to leave and may use reasonable force if they refuse. Best practice is not to forcibly eject trespassers; instead call the police if needed, or seek an injunction to prevent their return.

Protection from Harassment Act 1997. This Act makes it an offence to engage in a “course of conduct” amounting to harassment of a person. Significantly, it “protects individuals, who are conducting lawful activities, from harassment by protestors”. So repeated targeting or stalking of shoot personnel (e.g. following gamekeepers repeatedly, making serious threats against the shoot) can breach the harassment law. The police can charge under this Act if there have been at least two incidents or behaviour that causes alarm or distress.

Public Order Act 1986 (intentional harassment/distress). This Act makes it an offence to use “threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with intent to cause harassment, alarm or distress.” (Section 4A). This carries up to six months’ imprisonment. If a protester directly abuses or threatens in order to disrupt you, that may qualify. There is also the lesser offence of “likely to cause” where *intent* is not required (Section 5). It’s enough that the behaviour was *likely* to cause harm, even if no one actually did feel harassed or distressed. This offence is punishable by a fine only.

Criminal Damage Act 1971. Intentionally or recklessly destroying or damaging property (e.g. traps, shoot huts or vehicles) is a crime. If such damage occurs, it can be charged even without direct confrontation. Damage that could endanger life is aggravated criminal damage.

Drone / Air Navigation (Regulations 2016). All drone (UAV) use in the UK is governed by the Civil Aviation (Air Navigation) Order 2016. Article 95 of that Order prohibits flying a drone over large gatherings or within 50 metres of vehicles or structures not under the pilot’s control. An unauthorised drone filming over a shoot or hovered near guns could easily break these rules. Additionally, the operator may need CAA permission for photography; reckless drone flights can also be prosecuted under common nuisance or even “endangering safety” provisions. Importantly, you may *not* shoot down drones; that could be criminal damage or firearms misuse. Instead, police should be called to deal with unauthorised drones. (For more see the Moorland Association’s guidance on drones).

Key point. The police can only intervene when a criminal offence (harassment, assault, aggravated trespass, etc.) has or is occurring, so keeping detailed evidence of these acts is essential.

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Section 3. Specific considerations in Wales

The overall approach is the same, but a few legal nuances and administrative differences apply. Wales's access rights come from the Land Reform (Wales) Act 2016. All UK criminal laws (aggravated trespass, harassment, public order, drone laws) apply identically in Wales. The police forces (North Wales, Gwent, Dyfed-Powys, South Wales) have Rural Crime Teams similar to English forces.

There is an explicit provision for “discretionary restrictions” on access land for dog control (e.g. excluding dogs entirely during certain periods). Unlike in England (where dogs must be on short leads in spring), Welsh owners may completely bar dogs on a moor for lambing or the shoot season under notified schemes. Always be aware of posting notices, failing to comply with a lawful access restriction order is itself an offence.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has the power to issue or lift access restrictions, and to enforce them. If needed, a land manager can contact NRW to establish a restriction (for example, if a planned event warrants temporary exclusion).

In summary, legal protections for shooting in Wales mirror England's. The main differences lie in who manages open access and what temporary restrictions are possible.

Follow the same procedures: ensure everyone's safety, report offences and invoke criminal law as needed.

Sources. Key legal points are drawn from statutes and Crown Prosecution Service guidance. Practical advice is based on NGO and BASC guidance. This note compiles up-to-date regulations (including Air Navigation Order 2016).

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